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AUTHOR	Fischer, Lucy Rose; Silverman, Jane
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ABSTRACT

Grandmothering has been described as a "tenuous" role in modern families in that grandparenting is specified as a symbolic linkage but is ambiguous in terms of behavioral expectations. This paper addresses the following question: How do role relational partners modulate their own behavior when there is ambiguity in expectations for interaction? The pilot study reported here examines patterns of consensus and dissension about grandparenthood by comparing the responses of (1) mothers and grandmothers and (2) maternal and paternal grandmothers. "Tenuous" role relationships were expected to be characterized by consensus on the symbolic structure of the relationship and dissension on the expectations for interaction. The sample consisted of 30 family "cases" with maternal and/or paternal grandmothers residing locally -- yielding 44 mother-grandmother dyads. Tape recorded telephone interviews were conducted with 30 mothers, 20 maternal grandmothers, and 24 paternal grandmothers. The interviews focused on expectations for interaction. The mothers and grandmothers were given an equivalent series of five scenarios referring to possible types of interactions: babysitting (daytime-emergency and evening-entertainment), advice-giving, playing, and discipline. For each scenario, the respondents were asked to tell what hypothetically they would do and to describe comparable situations. The interviews also included a number of background questions and a few open-ended questions about the symbolic nature of grandparental relationships. Results are discussed. (RH)

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Grandmothering as a "Tenuous" Role Relationship*

Lucy Rose Fischer, Ph.D.

and

Jane Silverman, M.A.

Department of Sociology

Minnesota Family Study Center

University of Minnesota

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ABSTRACT

Grandmotherhood is defined as a "tenuous" role relationship in that grandparenting is specified as a symbolic linkage but is ambiguous in terms of behavioral expectations. This paper addresses the following question: How do role relational partners modulate their own behavior when there is ambiguity in expectations for interaction? The pilot study reported here examines patterns of consensus and dissensus about grandparenthood, comparing mothers versus grandmothers and maternal versus paternal grandmothers. The results of this project suggest that expectations for grandmothering--1) are divergent between mothers and grandmothers in terms of expectations for interaction but not in terms of the symbolic significance of the role; 2) are more divergent between in-laws; 3) are divergent systematically--reflecting role perspectives; and 4) reflect attempts by each partner to maximize control over her own behavior and minimize dependence on the responses from the other.

GRANDMOTHERING AS A "TENUOUS" ROLE RELATIONSHIP

Grandmothering has been described as a "tenuous" role in modern families (Hagestad and Speicher, 1981)--in that grandparents have emotional and symbolic rather than instrumental positions in family structure (Fischer, 1982-83). The tenuousness of grandparenthood is exemplified by the fact that grandparents rarely have legal rights or responsibilities vis-a-vis their grandchildren (cf. Wilson and DeShane, 1982). The lack of a legal specification for grandparents, even if not often a pragmatic problem, points to the paradoxical position of grandparents--whose tie to grandchildren may be strong emotionally and symbolically but whose day-to-day relationship with grandchildren may be weak or even non-existent.

The notion of "tenuous" roles comes from Rosow (1976) who defines this role type as having a status (that is, social position) but no role (that is, set of expected behaviors). Unfortunately, "role" often seems to be an elusive concept and can refer to attributes, emotions, skills, performances, or positions in social structure. Rosow (1976) attempts to clarify the conceptual parameters of role theory by pointing out that "status" and "role" are <u>not</u> "Siamese twins," as had been implied by Linton (1936)--but that one can have a status but not a role, and vice versa. But in Rosow's definition of "status" there is no clear distinction between positions in social structures and attributes.[1]

In applying Rosow's framework to the study of grandparenthood, or family networks in general, it becomes useful to specify role as a relational concept--thus "one plays a role vis-a-vis another person's role which is attached to a counter position" (Mitchell, 1968). Within this context, we can differentiate between two components of role relationships that are roughly parallel to "status" and "role": a) the symbolic linkage and b) the expectations for interaction. This dichotomy has been described by Fischer (1981:615-16):

> The symbolic component of a relationship refers to the <u>meaning</u> attributed to the relationship by each member of the dyad...The <u>interactional</u> domain refers to the external components of a relationship, i.e., what the individuals do with and for each other.

In grandparenthood, as a tenuous role relationship, the symbolic linkage is clear--that is, grandparent and grandchild have unambiguous positions that orient them to each other within their kinship network (as is evident on a diagram of a family tree). But the expectations for interaction may <u>not</u> be specified for grandparent and grandchildren. The extent of involvement with and obligations between generations remains in large part discretionary. Thus relationships across generations need to be negotiated as family members interact. (Hagestad and Speicher, 1981).

It can be argued that the tenuousness of grandparental role relationships is more problematic for the grandparent generation than for the parent or the grandchild generation. As Hagestad and Dixon (1980) point out, grandparenthood begins as a "countertransition," that is, an involuntary transition that is linked to the life course of other family members. While this transition is not necessarily undesirable, the grandparent has no control over the passage. (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1971).

Grandparenthood as a Symbolic Linkage

Grandparenthood can be described as a symbolic linkage in three ways: 1) as a position in a family network; 2) as an identity bond; and 3) as an emotional investment in the grandchild. The first refers to the social construction of role relationships--that is, in the case of family relationships, the ascribed statuses that individuals occupy vis-a-vis each other. The second refers to the component of self-definition resulting from occupying a specific role within a social network. And the third refers to the emotional content of role relationships. Thus, the symbolic linkage is comprised of the meaning of relationships, in terms of both social positioning and attributions for the self, and the feelings that are associated with and emerge from symbolic linkages.

Grandparenthood entails a vertical tie in a family network--in which there is a finite number of grandparental positions. In fact, each grandparental position is unique--that is, for example, there is only one maternal grandmother (unless the family is "reconstituted" after a divorce).

Grandparenthood can be viewed as an "identity bond," in the sense discussed by Turner (1970) in that the grandparental relationship may serve as a component of self-definition. The identity component of grandparenthood, for instance, is illustrated by the statement of a middle aged woman who claims that she is "too young" to be a grandmother--implying that she cannot reconcile different aspects of her self identity--that is, her sense of her age and her generational position in her family. Kahana and Kahana (1971) imply that grandparental roles, as identity bonds, may be especially important in old age as people disengage from work and community roles.

Grandparenting probably is most often described by grandparents themselves in terms of the emotional investment in the grandchild (Fischer, 1982-83). To the extent that grandparenthood is not one of authority (cf. Apple, 1956), the emotional content of grandparenthood may be the defining component of the role relationship. Robertson (1976) writes that grandparents view "emotional gratification" as the "appropriate or expected behavior" of grandparenting. But we might question the denoting of "emotional gratification" as a "behavior." The emotional dimension of a relationship connotes how people feel about each other and may be orthogonal to the behavioral/interactive components of relationships. To say that emotional gratification is central and also to make the point, as Robertson does, that there are few other frequent behaviors in grandparenting means that grandparenthood is specified much more in terms of the symbolic linkage than interactive content--that it is, in effect, a "tenuous role relationship."

Kahana and Kahana (1971) report that there is a "lack of spontaneity" and a "ritualistic quality" in grandparents' descriptions of their interactions with their grandchildren. Kivnick (1982) writes that grandmothers who see grandparenthood as central in their lives tend to be deprived in other aspects of their lives. In other words, while symbolic relationships may be important for a sense of well-being, they may be inadequate substitutes for interactive bonds.

The Interactive Content of Grandparenthood

In this paper, the tenuousness of grandparenthood will be examined in terms of three components of interaction: 1) mediation by the parent generation; 2) grandparents as adjunct parents; and 3) grandparents as service providers. The interactive context of grandparenting involves three generations--with the

parent generation mediating or setting "the pace" of the relationship between grandparent and grandchild (Robertson, 1976). Especially for very young children, interaction with grandparents occurs at the initiation, or at least with the acquiesence, of the parents. This three generation system is a much more complex unit than is a dyadic relationship--since three relationships are involved rather than one. Since mothers tend more than fathers to serve as "gatekeepers" to their children, maternal grandparents have more access to their grandchildren than do paternal grandparents (cf. Fischer, 1983). Thus, the asymmetry in grandparenthood between maternal and paternal grandparents reflects the parental mediation. In Figure 1, grandparental interactions are diagrammed in terms of a three-generation triad: In Figure 1.a, mediated relationships are drawn along two sides of the triad--with the grandparent-grandchild relationship filtered through the parents.

A potentially important dimension of the interactive content of grandparenthood can be described as "adjunct parenthood"--in two senses: First, grandparents can train or otherwise help the parents to become parents. Hader (1965) asserts that an important function of grandparenthood is to shape the mother's capacity for the maternal role. The closeness between mothers and daughters after daughters becomes mothers may entail the grandmother's providing a variety of supports for the daughter's mothering (cf. Fischer, 1981; 1983). Second, grandmothers can serve as adjunct parents by acting as a second maternal figure for the child (Hader, 1965). Thus, in Figure 1.b, we see that as adjunct parents, the grandparent engages in parental interactions with the parent and/or with the child.

The third interactive framework--grandparents as service providers--is centered on the relationship between the grandparent and parent generations. The most common service is babysitting. (cf. Robertson, 1975; Fischer, 1979). Although this leads to grandparent-grandchild interactions, the service is provided for the parent and the negotiations for this service are between parent and grandparent (see Figure 1.c). Babysitting is one of the most commonly mentioned behaviors associated with grandparenthood (Robertson, 1975) and is one of the few behaviors that is under the control of the grandparent. Nonetheless, the actual amount of babysitting and the expectations for this service vary widely. There is some suggestive data indicating that mothers would like more and grandmothers would prefer less grandparental babysitting (Fischer, 1981; Cohler and Grunebaum, 1981).

Grandmothers, Mothers, and Granddaughters:

This paper addresses the following question: How do role relational partners modulate their own behavior when expectations for interaction are ambiguous? Grandmothers and mothers are likely to have at least some diverging expectations concerning all three components of interaction that have been outlined above. What we need to examine is the extent to which their role perspectives systematically distort their expectations for each other.

The pilot study reported here makes two comparisons: a) mother versus grandmother and b) maternal versus paternal grandmothers. This paper compares two divergent female lineages: maternal grandmother-mother-granddaughter and paternal grandmother-mother-granddaughter. Previous studies have found that the closest grandparental relationships tend to be between maternal grandmothers and granddaughters and the most "tenuous" may be between paternal grandmothers and granddaughters (cf. Hagestad and Speicher, 1981; Kahana, and Kahana, 1970).

According to the framework outline above, "tenuous" role relationships should be characterized by consensus on the symbolic structure of the relationship and dissensus on the expectations for interaction. To the extent that there is ambiguity across generations in expectations for grandmothers, we should expect to find greater dissensus between in-laws (cf. Fischer, 1983).

The results of this project support the following conclusions about grandmothering as a "tenuous" role relationship:

Expectations for grandmothering--

1) are divergent between mothers and grandmothers in terms of expectations for interaction but not in terms of the symbolic significance of the role;

2) are more divergent between in-laws;

3) are divergent systematically--reflecting role perspectives; and

4) entail attempts by each role partner to maximize control over her own behavior and minimize dependence on the response from the other.

A STUDY OF GRANDMOTHERS AND MOTHERS

Sample and Design: The sample consists of 30 family "cases" with maternal and/or paternal grandmothers residing locally--yielding 44 mother-grandmother dyads. The sample was obtained from the birth announcements of daughters, listed in a Minneapolis newspaper, dated approximately 1-1/2 years prior to the research. Thus, the sex and age of one grandchild was held constant across all the cases.

The research entailed tape recorded telephone interviews with 30 mothers, 20 maternal grandmothers and 24 paternal grandmothers. The interviews focused on expectations for interaction. The mothers and grandmothers were given an equivalent series of five scenarios referring to possible types of interactions: babysitting (daytime-emergency and evening-entertainment); advice-giving; playing; and discipline. For each scenario, the respondents were asked both to tell what they would do hypothetically and to describe comparable situations. For all of these situations, the mothers and grandmothers were requested to refer to the granddaughter who was then about one and a half years old. The interviews also included a number of background questions (most of which were asked only of the mothers, who were interviewed first) and a few open-ended questions about the symbolic nature of grandparental relationships.

A Dyadic Framework: In most previous research on grandmothering, grandparents have been asked about the grandparent "role" in general, either not referring to the parental linkage (maternal/paternal) and/or not specifying the grandchild relationship (cf. Neugarten and Weinstein, 1964; Robertson, 1977). An important component of this study is the use of dyads as units of analysis. The study makes two comparisons: a) mother versus grandmother and b) maternal versus paternal grandmothers. In this research, the grandchild is specified so that the focus is on particular grandparent-grandchild relationships (cf. Fischer, 1982-83). It should be noted that the dyadic perspectives are not those of grandparent-grandchild. If grandparenthood is a mediated relationship, the relational framework is negotiated initially by the parent and grandparent generations.

CONSENSUS ON THE SYMBOLIC RELATIONSHIP

Consensus Among Grandmothers: At the very end of the interviews, the grandmothers were asked "to describe in your own words what it's like for you to have a grandchild." Respondents included both new and veteran grandmothers and although they varied in their emotional expressivity and the extent of their family involvements, their descriptions of grandparenting were strikingly similar: Virtually all of them described grandparenthood in terms of an emotional investment in their grandchildren:

> It puts you on cloud nine. It is very different from having your own. I love all my own kids but the love for a grandchild is almost deeper I think. It is like doubling Judy's (daughter's) love with little Debby (granddaughter) running around...It's a terrific feeling.

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> I think it's the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to myself. Other than having my son, and I think, well, it's so different, it's like you relive your own children and they're just about the most precious thing in the world to me, you know with the family, the whole family. But grandchildren, that's something else. They're just, I'd say that they're the essence of crown and glory in life.

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> It's a good feeling...she's a plus, and it's really fun seeing her and I don't feel as though I have any responsibility because her parents are very responsible. It's been a plus, we thoroughly enjoy seeing her, she's a lot of fun. But see, I don't expect her to fill my life or that kind of thing. It's a plus but it's not a motive for being here.

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> It's a nice feeling...to see your children have their children. It's kind of fun to see them growing, changes as they get older. You're out, and even though you aren't seeing them much, you show pictures, and your other friends are bragging now, they have a new one, maybe a first grandchild, and you had that eight years ago. And you know what they're feeling, because you went around and everybody had to look at the picture whether they wanted to or not...

More than a third of the grandmothers described a sense of continuity through the generations--reflecting both their symbolic positioning in their family network (a tie across generations) and their self-identity (grandparenthood as immortality for the self) (cf. Bengtson and Kuypers, 1971). Almost half of the grandmothers talked about having the "fun without the responsibility." Only one grandmother in the sample said that having a grandchild did not bring a special feeling (and even that grandmother had stated that she wanted her grown children to live nearby--especially when the grandchildren were little). In effect, these grandmothers suggest that they feel a tie with their grandchildren, emotionally and symbolically--even if "you aren't seeing them much."

Agreement Between Mothers and Grandmothers: The symbolic importance of grandparenthood is indicated also by the consensus between mothers and daughters and between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law on the desirability of grandparents living nearby to their grandchildren. This also may reflect the interactive domain; and the sample, of course, was selected because of locally residing grandmothers. Nonetheless, the grandparent-grandchild bond does appear to be an important family tie which is consciously weighed in peoples' decisions about where to live. Almost 90% of the mother-daughter pairs and three quarters of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law pairs agreed that living nearby to each other was important for the children's sake.

The interview data suggest ways in which grandparents and parents attempt to inculcate symbolic linkages between grandmother and grandchild. Parents often seem to make a point of reiterating "gramma's" name--"if we say 'where's Gramma' she looks"--and grandparents sometimes develop special rituals or games that the grandchild can learn to associate with them. "We have a little game; that's how we get her to start smiling, and I don't know if she knows who I am or if the little game is just a familiar thing..." Through these names and games, the grandmother, who might otherwise be an unfamiliar figure, is marked as a significant other to the infant or toddler child.

DISSENSUS ON THE INTERACTIONAL DOMAIN OF GRANDMOTHERING

Direct versus Mediated Interactions with Grandchildren: While parents and grandparents may attempt to create a symbolic linkage with the infant or toddler grandchild, the actual amount of interaction often means that grandmothers are essentially "strangers"--and are among those who are rejected during the infant's "fear of strangers" phase. In the interviews, both mothers and grandmothers commented on the potential for estrangement with grandchildren--with lack of frequent contact pointed to as the cause:

> (How well does your granddaughter know you?) Not very well at all. We don't see them all that often--not nearly as often as I'd like. (paternal grandmother)

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> (Does your granddaughter recognize you?) I believe so. Now I don't always know. She's a friendly child. We were up at the lake and they came up for a long weekend. We were up there three or four days and I spent quite a bit of time with her. Now she might recognize me this week, and if I didn't see her for three or four weeks, I wouldn't be sure... (paternal grandmother)

Both the mothers and grandmothers indicated that it is hard to distinguish the granddaughter's reaction to a grandmother from her response to "other strangers." In effect, the love of grandmothers for the child seems to be prescribed. Sometimes this is reciprocated (the grandchild's face might "light up" when the grandparent arrives). But the extent and type of interactions are negotiated--through the initiative of the grandmother, the mediation of the mother, and the responses of the grandchild (see Figure 1.a).

In one of the scenarios, the mothers and grandmothers were asked what they would do if the grandmother were supposed to take the granddaughter out for a walk but the child "starts to cry and wants to go back to her mother." Table 1

shows that the responses of the mothers and grandmothers tend to differ. While the mothers indicated that they would leave a crying child with the grandmother (assuming the grandmother would manage and the child would stop crying), the grandmothers tended to say that they would not take the child if she continued to cry. The responses from the maternal and paternal grandmothers are very similar. However, the mothers are somewhat less likely to say they would leave a crying child with a paternal grandmother (so that, for this scenario, there is more dissensus with maternal grandmothers). In this type of situation (when contact with the child is essentially recreational), the grandmothers tend to portray mediated interactions with their grandchildren: Since the child's primary tie is with the mother, the child can choose or refuse to spend time with the grandmother. Thus the grandmothers tend to see the interaction shaped by the child's response. The mothers, on the other hand, appear to view the choice made by their own behavior (that is, the mother can leave the child alone with the grandmother). The mothers do not emphasize their mediary role--except in the sense that by their behavior (i.e., leaving) they can foster a direct grandmother-granchild relationship--at least within the context of giving the grandmother "playing" time with the grandchild.

----Table 1 about here----

The responses of mothers and grandmothers to another scenario concerning mediation by the mother also differed--but in an opposite direction. The following scene was described: The mother and granddaughter are at the grandmother's home. The granddaughter grabs the grandmother's delicate crystal vase. When the grandmother tries to take it away from her, the child throws a temper tantrum. As Table 2 shows, the mothers tended to respond that they would take sole responsibility for disciplining the child, while the grandmothers were much more likely to say that they would participate in the disciplining. The divergence of perspectives is found particularly with paternal grandmothers.

----Table 2 about here----

One mother, for instance, makes a clear distinction between how she responds with her own mother versus her mother-in-law in such situations. If she is at her mother's house, she says--"I just let her throw her temper tantrum. She gets over it very fast." She is, however, more cautious at her mother-in-law's house: "I would try to console her more so than at my mother's, and snap her out of it...I just don't like her to scream and cry in front of my mother-in-law. She (mother-in-law) seems to look at me funny when I let them just kick and cry all the time." In this case, the mother-in-law said that she "would just take the piece away from her and let her continue with her tantrum until she's through"--suggesting that the mother-in-law's method of discipline may be quite similar to her daughter-on-law's and that she might not, in actuality, need to be "protected" from the tantrum. These findings indicate strikingly different expectations for and interpretations of behavior--especially between in-laws, three quarters of whom disagree on what would happen.

This scenario poses an interesting contrast with the previous situation--with rather different reasons for the mediation by the mother. In the first scenario, the grandmothers tend to place limits on their rights to interact with the child. In the second type of situation, the mothers mediate in order to protect the grandmother (especially with a mother-in-law)—seeing themselves as responsible for preventing damage to the grandmother's household. The dissensus in both types of situations indicates the lack of prescriptive behaviors in the grandmother-grandchild relationship.

Grandmothers as Adjunct Parents: Since grandparents have parented the parents, one potential framework for interaction entails grandmothers providing socialization or training in parental skills--especially by giving advice. One of the scenarios concerned what would happen if the grandmother had information about "a new kind of teething ring" that "might not be safe." In this type of situation, which concerned the grandchild's well-being, only 2 (5%) of the grandmothers (one maternal and one paternal) in the sample said that they would say nothing at all. Thirty percent of the maternal grandmothers but only 4% of the paternal grandmothers said they would try to persuade the mothers not to use the teething rings. Most said they would just give the information. What is most salient about the responses of the grandmothers is their tendency to express a sense of caution about interfering. Half of the maternal grandmothers and more than three quarters of the paternal grandmothers explicitly mentioned their caution in giving advice. One paternal grandmother quipped: "I'm very careful how I say things to my daughter-in-law because I know the reputation of a mother-in-law..." Another mother-in-law, when asked about giving advice, said that there are things she

> would like to discuss but don't because I don't care to interfere...one thing--I don't believe in a pacifier for a baby. I never did and I never will. But she believes in them because they keep the baby quiet or whatever...I told them I didn't like them but that was the end of it. The baby continues having a pacifier. I believe in early potty training, she does not...that would be something I would change also. I mean I raised four kids of my own and I mean I'm still familiar with raising children. But somehow they think as you get older you forget what you're doing...

The caution expressed by the grandmothers, in fact, may be warranted. In responding to their version of the advice-scenario, less than a fifth of the young mothers said that they would simply act on the grandmother's advice. The modal response was to consider but not necessarily use the advice; and a number of the young mothers implied that they would not take such advice from grandmothers seriously: They would just listen politely and do as they pleased.

There is, however, one area in which mothers do appear to call on the grandmothers for advice--and that concerns health issues. About a third of paternal grandmothers and two thirds of maternal grandmothers were asked for advice in dealing with the sickness or an accident of a child.

> As a matter of fact, she called twice this morning. Linda was up at the lake, at the cottage this weekend, and Linda caught her finger in a folding chair. And she called me just a few moments ago, and said that so much (pus) had come out of it, and what should she do, because Laura was trying to go pick the scab off of it. I think it's mostly health, things that she doesn't know. (maternal grandmother)

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> Judy was very constipated and I asked her what I should do. And she said, why don't you give the doctor a call, so I did, and he prescribed a suppository, and I was having a hard time using the (suppository) so I called my mom and I said, can I come over and you help me. She said, sure come over so we packed her stuff up and went over there. (mother)

Interestingly, in these cases, the mothers can admit that they lack certain technical information or skills and can call on the grandmothers to contribute mothering skills both for themselves and for their grandchildren (see Figure 1.b). In the area of health advice, the interaction lies on the boundary between family and non-family relationships. A grandmother serves as a screen--being asked for her opinion before a paid professional is called upon. That grandmothers are asked and may have somewhat more freedom to give advice about health than about other childrearing issues implies that they do some adjunct parenting. But if the parameters of advice-giving are fuzzy, grandmothers continually need to be cautious about overstepping boundaries.

Another issue which illustrates the sense of caution in adjunct parenting can be seen in the perceptions of mothers and grandmothers on the similarity-dissimilarity of their disciplining styles. As Table 3 shows, 40% of the maternal grandmothers and mothers disagree about their similarity in disciplining--in all of these cases the mother perceives more similarity and the grandmother more dissimilarity. Paternal grandmothers and mothers also tend to have different perceptions on their disciplining styles--but here the mother (daughter-in-law) is more likely to perceive the styles as dissimilar. The grandmothers often stated explicitly that they did not tell their daughters (or daughters-in-law) when they had differing ideas about disciplining--so as not to interfere. For example, one young mother said about the maternal grandmother: "I think we're pretty similar but she's kind of more easy-going than I am because she's gramma." But her mother thought her daughter was more lenient than she: "...She probably gives them a little more treats than I would and at times when I don't think they should have them. (When the granddaughter stands up in her highchair) I think I would be a little more--"this is it, you sit there and you eat." (asked if she ever said anything)...No never, I never interfere with the kids." Given the cautiousness of grandmothers in their adjunct parenting role, the mothers may simply not be aware of the grandmothers' opinions.

----Table 3 about here----

The dissensus between maternal grandmothers and mothers is in an opposite direction from the findings reported by Bengtson and Kuypers (1971) on the divergence between older and younger generations. With maternal grandmothers, the divergence relates to the tenuousness of adjunct parenting and perhaps also to the daughter's need to have a sense of continuity with her mother (Fischer, 1981). In the in-law relationships, the reason for dissensus perhaps emerges from the grandmother's need to have a sense of continuity with her children and grandchildren (conforming to Bengtson and Kuyper's (1971) analysis of the "developmental stakes") while the mother may seek to ally more with her own family of origin (see Fischer's (1983) discussion of in-law relations).

Grandmothers as Service Providers: When grandparents babysit they are providing a service to the parents. Grandparents may develop a relationship with their grandchildren through babysitting but the arrangements are made with and for the sake of the parents (see Figure 1.c). Two types of scenarios were described in which babysitting might be needed: 1) when the mother and father had planned to go to a big party and their babysitter cancelled in the last minute; and 2) when the mother became ill with the flu. In addition, the grandmothers and mothers were asked, in general, about the frequency and likelihood of a grandmother babysitting. A summary measure was constructed to assess the overall likelihood of the grandmother's coming to babysit, from the two perspectives.

Overall, the grandmothers were three times more likely to be frequent babysitters (27%) than to never babysit (9%) (with equal numbers of maternal and paternal grandmothers frequently or never babysitting). The measure used for "likelihood of babysitting" (Table 4.A.) is partly a probabalistic and partly a behavioral indicator. For those grandmothers who babysit either frequently or never, the indicator reflects a behavior; for the others it may tap an expectation. Because of the nature of the interaction (whether or not the grandmother babysits is rather straightforward to assess), the possible variance between perspectives has to be more limited than for other types of interaction. Table 4.A. shows that there is considerably more dissensus between mothers and paternal grandmothers (46%) than between mothers and maternal grandmothers (20%)--especially with the paternal grandmothers more likely to assert that they would babysit.

----Table 4.A about here----

In their responses to the babysitting scenario, a number of mothers and grandmothers expressed some sense of concern with setting limits--that is, ensuring that the mother not "impose" on the grandmother. Some of the mothers talked of not wanting to "dump babysitting" on the grandmothers. "We really don't want to burden them, have them stay home now that their family's gone." One grandmother, with eight grandchildren, said that she "would be forever sitting"—so she will not babysit "unless it's an emergency...then I will probably cancel (her own plans)...But I feel as though the kids will sometimes take advantage of a parent..." A number of grandmothers indicated that they have "really been lucky" or that their children "won't infringe"--suggesting that limits have been set by the parents. The frequencies in Table 4.B. indicate that mothers are more likely to worry about imposing on paternal than maternal grandmothers but that maternal grandmothers are considerably more likely than paternal grandmothers to mention the issue of limits for grandmothers' babysitting. This issue of babysitting presents the flip side of the advice-giving issue. Service-providing is in the domain controlled by the grandparent. Given diffusely defined expectations for this aspect of grandparent-parent interactions, it is the mother who must be especially cautious about overstepping boundaries. The mothers do seem especially concerned about imposing on their in-laws--which might be expected (cf. Fischer, 1983). The concern with limits expressed by maternal grandmothers might be suggestive of a boundary problem--especially since the daughters do <u>not</u> tend to express this concern. In effect, there quite often may be misreading between mother and daughter on just how much the mother/grandmother wants and is obliged to provide babysitting services (cf. Cohler and Grunebaum, 1981; Fischer, 1981).

----Table 4.B about here----

CONCLUSION

A "tenuous" role relationship has been defined as one in which the symbolic nature of the relationship is specified but the behavioral expectations are ambiguous. The dissensus between mothers and grandmothers in their responses to varying hypothetical situations supports the notion of grandmothering as a tenuous role relationship. Paternal grandparental relationships are particularly tenuous since the interactive framework is largely contingent on in-laws (that is, paternal grandmothers and mothers) (cf. Fischer, 1983).

The qualitative data from both grandmothers and mothers suggest that grandparenthood is valued as a symbolic relationship. This means that both generations will have a stake in maintaining the relationship. Because mothers and grandmothers have ambiguous expectations for each others' behavior, each role partner needs to place boundaries around her own behavior in order not to jeopardize the symbolic relationship. Furthermore, their differing role perspectives mean that they have differential liabilities in overstepping interactive boundaries. The grandmothers, particularly the in-laws, are cautious about intruding on the nuclear family established by the parent generation: Grandmothers are careful about giving advice or commenting on parenting and also tend to be unwilling to intrude on the child's domain (taking the granddaughter against her will). The mothers express caution, again especially with in-laws, about the grandmother's domain--protecting the grandmother's home from their child's uncontrolled behavior and placing limits on demands for grandparental services.

The "tenuousness" of expectations for grandparental interactions seems greater from the grandmother's role perspective. Robertson (1977:172) reported that "the only behaviors which grandmothers engaged in with a high frequency were those which were initiated by the parent or grandchild." In this study, too, grandmothers tend to express more caution about overstepping relational boundaries than do the mothers.

Grandparenthood endures as a symbolic linkage whether grandparents have "formal," "distant," (Neugarten and Weinstein, 1964), "remote," (Robertson, 1977), or highly involved relationships with their grandchildren. Fischer (1982-83) has suggested that the structure of family networks may differentiate between interactively involved and non-involved grandparents--especially with older grandchildren:

> The family networks of near grandmothers may entail interpersonal linkages between grandparent and grandchild as well as between parent and child of each generation. Geographically far grandmothers (or paternal grandmothers), on the other hand, may never get to "know" their grandchildren anywhere near as well as they once knew their growing children; so even though the mother-daughter or (mother-son) bond may be maintained over the years, the kinship network may be fairly loose--with grandparents having essentially indirect bonds...

In effect, some relationships between grandparents and older grandchildren may not really be "tenuous"--in the sense that interactive scripts may be developed within close interpersonal bonds. But most research on grandmotherhood suggests that the modal pattern is for grandparental relationships to become increasingly tenuous with the aging of both grandparents and grandchildren. Age may be an important variable affecting grandchildren, parents and grandparents. None of the interactive frameworks that have been discussed above, and diagrammed in Figure 1, may be salient with older grandchildren.

Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) have found that older grandparents are more likely than younger grandparents to adopt a "formal" style of grandparenting. And Kahana and Kahana (1970) have reported that older grandchildren tend to be more emotionally distant from their grandparents than younger grandchildren. Possibly, over time, the "tenuousness" in grandparental relationships may become synonymous with "formality"--so that grandparents and grandchildren learn to anticipate each other's responses by limiting their range of interaction. Indeed, the caution expressed by both the grandmothers and the mothers in this

study suggest that there is a sense of tension in sustaining tenuous role relationships.

Footnote

1. For instance, Rosow (1976) has a lengthy discussion of "old age" as a "status" (without a role) but, later, he refers in passing to homosexuals as having no status. He defines status as "a formal office or social position that can be designated by name or a clear term of reference." (Rosow, 1976:462). By his own definition, it is not evident why the aged do have an institutionalized status while homosexuals do not. It would seem more approrpiate to describe old age as an attribute.

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Table 1. If the Grandchild Cries When Going out with the Grandmother, Who Takes the Child: Mother or Grandmother?--from the Perspectives of Mothers, Maternal and Paternal Grandmothers (in %)

	GOING WITH MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER		GOING WITH PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER	
	Perspective of:		Perspective of:	
	Mother	Grandmother	Mother	Grandmother
Grandmother takes child	85	15	57	17
Negotiated arrangement	15	25	26	30
Mother takes child	0	55	17	52

% DISSENSUS:

Maternal Grandmother and Mother: 55%
Paternal Grandmother and Mother: 35%

Table 2. Who Disciplines Child at the Grandmother's Home (in %)

	AT MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER'S HOME		AT PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER'S HOME	
	Perspective of		Perspective of	
	Mother	Grandmother	Mother	Grandmother
Only Mother	68	32	86	22
Mother or Grandmother	32	68	14	78
N =	(19)	(19)	(21)	(21)

% DISENSUS:

Maternal Grandmother-Mother: 33%
Paternal Grandmother-Mother: 74%

Table 3. Perspectives of Similarity/Dissimilarity in Disciplining Style--Consensus and Dissensus between Mothers and Grandmothers (in %)

	MOTHERS AND MATERNAL GRANDMOTHERS	MOTHERS AND PATERNAL GRANDMOTHERS
CONSENSUS ABOUT DISCIPLINE STYLE	60%	47.5%
Both say they are similar	55	33.5
Both say they are different	5	14
DISSENSUS ABOUT DISCIPLINE STYLE	40%	52.5%
Similar according to grandmother/different according to mother	0	33.5
Similar according to mother/different according to grandmother	40	19
N =	(20)	(21)

Table 4.A. Likelihood of Grandmother Babysitting--Consensus and Dissensus between Mothers and Grandmothers (in %)

	MOTHERS AND MATERNAL GRANDMOTHERS	MOTHERS AND PATERNAL GRANDMOTHERS
CONSENSUS	80%	54%
Both say grandmother babysits	40	21
Both say grandmother does not babysit	40	33
DISSENSUS		
Grandmother babysits:	20%	46%
Only according to grandmother	10	29
Only according to mother	10	17
N =	(20)	(24)

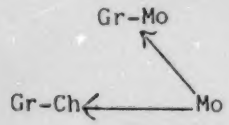
Table 4.B. Babysitting Services as an Imposition on Grandmothers: Percent of Mothers and Grandmothers Who Mention this Issue

MOTHER EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT "IMPOSING"		
about maternal grandmother	15	(20)
about paternal grandmother	29	(24)
GRANDMOTHER EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT "IMPOSING"		
maternal grandmother	40	(20)
paternal grandmother	17	(24)

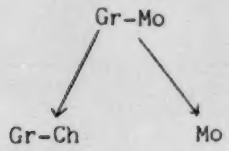
Figure 1

Three-generational Interactive Frameworks for Grandmotherhood

a. Mediation by the Parent Generation



b. Grandmother as Adjunct Parent



c. Grandmother as Service Provider